

Do You Need A Conference Board?

The
Washington
State
Child Support
Enforcement
Program



Division of Child Support



What is a Conference Board?

A Conference Board is an informal way to resolve disputes related to how the Division of Child Support (DCS) works your case. Sometimes a Conference Board can also provide relief from the effects of collection action or from a high support debt. The term Conference Board can mean either the meeting process or the DCS staff who conduct the meeting and make determinations.

What kinds of relief does the Conference Board have authority to grant?

When appropriate, the Conference Board can:

- Release liens filed by DCS.
- Release money DCS intercepted from IRS tax refunds.
- Lower the amount of a payroll deduction.
- Decide that DCS will not report a child support debt to a consumer credit reporting agency.
- Decide whether DCS will enforce an order or collect a debt based on:
 - Equitable principles.
 - Interstate issues.
- Write off (forgive) all or part of support debts owed to the State of Washington.

The Conference Board can write off debts owed to Washington State based on:

- Hardship to the paying parent or that parent's household.
- Settlement by partial payment.
- Costs of collection in excess of the support debt.
- An error or legal defect that reduces the possibility of collection.

What are some common problems the Conference Board cannot resolve?

A Conference Board cannot:

- Change the amount of child support ordered in an administrative or court order.
- Write off debts you owe to an individual, another state, or another agency.
- Determine visitation rights or custody issues.

Will a Conference Board be held in my case?

Sometimes the Conference Board Chair can issue a decision without holding a meeting. Either way, the Conference Board will issue a decision.

A Conference Board meeting will be held when additional evidence, testimony or factual information is needed to resolve the issues.

A Conference Board meeting will not be held when:

- You have already provided all the information needed to resolve the issues, or
- The Conference Board does not have the authority to give the relief that is being requested.

What happens at a Conference Board meeting?

The Conference Board generally consists of a DCS staff attorney and one or more field office staff from the particular field office in question. The Conference Board will discuss the facts presented. Conference Boards are designed to be informal. You may appear for the Conference Board in person or over the telephone. The Board members will listen and ask questions while you tell them your view of the dispute. Other parties affected by the dispute will have a similar opportunity. A typical Conference Board meeting will take less than an hour. After the Board members have made a decision that will affect you, the Conference Board Chair will write up the Board's decision and mail it to you.

Do I need an attorney?

You may represent yourself, or be represented at the Conference Board by an attorney, friend, relative, or other person of your choice. Most people represent themselves at Conference Boards.

How will I find out when my Conference Board will be held?

DCS will mail you a Notice of Conference Board that will give you the date, time and place of the meeting. Make sure that you keep DCS advised of your current mailing address.

How can I request a different date or time for my Conference Board?

If you cannot make it to your Conference Board at the scheduled date and time, you can ask for a continuance (a delay). If possible, contact DCS at least a week before the Conference Board day. The phone numbers for DCS will be on the Conference Board Notice.

The other parties may disagree with your request for a continuance. If all parties do not agree, the Conference Board Chair will decide whether to reschedule your Conference Board.

What happens if I do not appear for the Conference Board?

If you do not show up for the scheduled meeting and have not contacted DCS to request a continuance, the Chair will decide whether to dismiss the request, proceed with the Conference Board meeting without you, or reschedule the meeting for another time.



Will I attend the Conference Board in person or by phone?

The Conference Board Notice will tell you where to go for your Conference Board meeting. You may need to appear at a DCS office. Tell the Conference Board unit if you have a restraining order or fear the other party. You will not be required to appear in person together.

It is possible that you, the Conference Board Chair, DCS witnesses, or one or more of the other people involved in the Conference Board meeting may be participating by telephone. It is also possible that the Conference Board Notice will tell you that you must appear by phone.

When this happens, call the DCS Conference Board unit at the number on the notice to make sure that DCS has the correct phone number. Then make sure that you are available at that number and that the line is clear on the date and time for the meeting. If you have no phone available, contact the Conference Board unit as soon as possible to make special arrangements.

If you are appearing by phone, you should send or fax copies of all of your evidence to the Conference Board Chair and to every other party at least one week ahead of time.

How do I prepare for the Conference Board?

Make notes and bring them with you to help you organize your presentation and remember everything you want to say. You can discuss your case with the Conference Board Chair before the date of the meeting. This may clarify what the issues are. Collect any documents that might help the Conference Board understand and resolve the dispute. For example:

- Documents showing your income and expenses might help the Conference Board decide what monthly payments you can afford.
- School records may show that a child lived in your home.

Can I try to settle my case without a Conference Board?

DCS field office staff can make many of the kinds of decisions made by a Conference Board. Contact the DCS field office staff person assigned to your case if you would like to try to reach an agreement before the Conference Board meeting. It may help to talk to a field office lead worker or supervisor. If you cannot reach an agreement, you may still have a Conference Board.

Do I need to bring anything to the Conference Board?

The Conference Board will base its decision on information and statements that you and other witnesses provide, on DCS records and other information available to DCS. If you have papers you want the Conference Board to see, be sure to send them to DCS before your Conference Board, or bring them with you to your Conference Board meeting. You may bring witnesses or their signed, sworn, and dated statements.

All other parties have the right to see your proof, and to know who your witnesses are before the Conference Board meeting.

The Conference Board may send copies of any documents you submit all other Conference Board parties. Delete your address on these documents if you do not want your address released to other parties.

In a Conference Board meeting, you have the following rights:

- You can be represented by anyone, such as an attorney, friend or relative. However, you do not have a right to free legal help from DCS.
- You can present evidence and can object to evidence presented by anyone else.
- You can ask the Conference Board Chair for a continuance (delay) of the Conference Board meeting. You may have to show a good reason before the board will agree to the delay.

- You can ask the Conference Board to let you send in more evidence after the meeting.
- You can bring witnesses. You may also ask the Conference Board to have witnesses send or bring necessary papers to the meeting. The Board members have the right to question you and your witnesses.
- You can see and obtain copies of policies, rules, guidelines, and other DCS publications related to your Conference Board. There may be a charge for copies.

How will the Conference Board decide?

The Conference Board will first determine whether or not it has the authority to grant the relief you have requested. Next, the Conference Board will determine whether or not the relief requested is warranted based upon the evidence in your case.

What happens after the Conference Board?

The Conference Board Chair will mail out a written decision after the Conference Board. Be sure that DCS has your current address.

What if I don't like the Conference Board decision?

There is no formal appeal process. However, you may request an informal review by writing to the Conference Board Unit supervisor.

What if I do not speak English well?

If you or a witness need a language translator or interpreter, you will be provided help for free. You should ask for an interpreter at least a week before the meeting. A friend or relative may not be your interpreter unless approved in advance. Please contact the Conference Board Unit at DCS Headquarters with your request. The number is 1-800-457-6202 or 360-664-5005.

What if I need some kind of accommodation?

All DCS offices are wheelchair accessible. If you or a witness need other special assistance such as a sign language interpreter or alternate format materials because of a disability, you will be provided help free of charge. Ask for this assistance at least a week before the Conference Board meeting. Please contact the Conference Board Unit at DCS Headquarters at the numbers listed above. The DCS Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TDD) telephone number is (360) 664-5011.

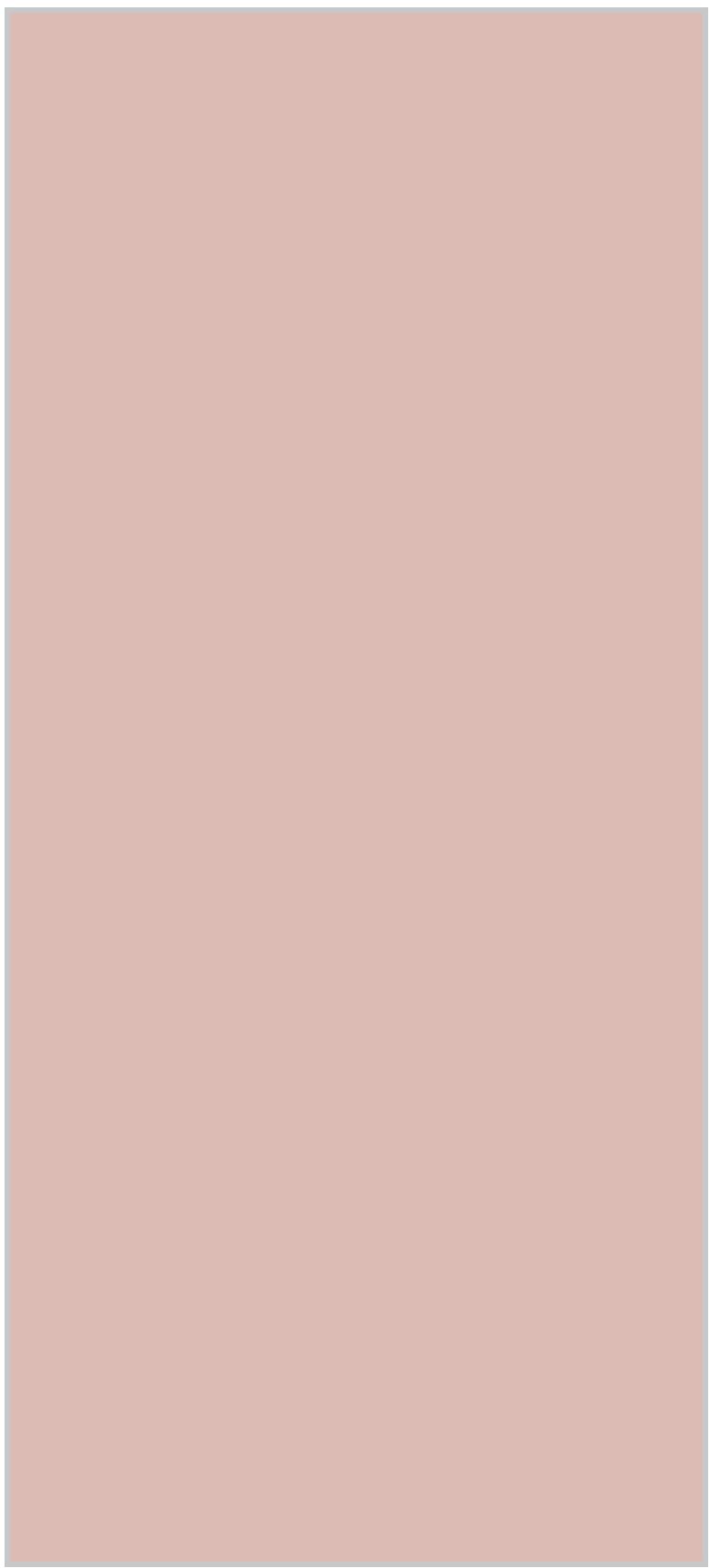
If you have questions that are not answered by this pamphlet, you may:

- Call the Division of Child Support field office or Conference Board Unit.
- Contact an attorney.

Where can I learn more about Conference Boards?

- The rules governing the Conference Board process are in the Washington Administrative Code at WAC 388-14-385, WAC 388-14-386, WAC 388-14-387, and WAC 388-14-388.
- Contact the DCS field office responsible for your case.









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